

Alegria Fresh Expands Hydroponic Vertical Farm at Bell Gardens High School; Southern California's First Working Vertical Farm on a High School Campus

IRVINE, Calif., Sept. 25, 2014 (SEND2PRESS NEWSWIRE) – Alegria Fresh announced today the expansion of the hydroponic vertical farm at Bell Gardens High School, Southern California's first working vertical farm on a high school campus. The farm, which features high-performance urban hydroponic vertical and organic farming methods, will be completed with Phase 2, a high efficiency organic food production system using GardenSoxx®.

GardenSoxx® is an organic food production system that can be used over cement or other man-made surfaces. The "Soxx" are made of eight inch diameter polypropylene mesh and can be filled with any compost or planting mix.

"Our next generation is challenged with access to nutrient-rich, fresh food, critical to maintaining health and energy. Our goal is to teach young people how to grow superior produce within the urban environment while substantially reducing the use of limited natural resources such as water and fertilizer," said Erik Cutter, Managing Director of Alegria Fresh.

Cutter built Alegria Farm at the Great Park, a hydroponic vertical farm comprised of 120 towers bearing 8,000 plants growing in a coconut husk mixture. The farm also includes the West Coast's first Soxx farm, 13 rows of 8-inch-thick fabric Soxx filed with a hybrid organic soil blend. Vegetables grow from holes precisely spaced in each Soxx.

Alegria Farm at the Great Park occupies a fifth of an acre but produces two-to-three times the output of a comparable farm plot, and with vastly less water. Veggies grown in towers use about 90 percent less water than conventional in-ground farming; growing in the Soxx uses 70 percent less.

The lettuce, cabbage, radicchio, onions, chard, celery, kale and other veggies in the hydroponic towers and Soxx grow faster and contain more vitamins and minerals because they get a steady flow of nutrient-rich water.

Bell Gardens High School students came to Alegria Farm after science teacher Jan Barber-Doyle learned about Cutter's farm. Her environmental science class was questioning how technology can help feed a growing world population, what strategies can best conserve water and other resources and which practices can improve food safety. Barber-Doyle thought Alegria would be a good place to learn something about all those topics. "It connected all those concepts to the real world," she said.

The students found the array of towers and racks and plants growing out of fabric tubes only mildly interesting – until Cutter mentioned what a great salsa could be made from the tomatoes, cilantro, onions and chilies that the students saw growing. That ignited a buzz.

How about a contest to see who could make the best salsa?

From that challenge, an unlikely partnership was born. Cutter built a bedroom-sized vertical garden in the quad of the high school campus, installing five vertical towers at the school, making it the only urban high school in Southern California with a working hydroponic vertical farm built by the students themselves.

Students tended the plants and planned the harvest celebration dinner complete with a salsa contest. In addition to the science class, students in the cooking class also joined the project and in July, students, parents and faculty voted on the first salsa contest winner.

“We’re on the edge of something very exciting here,” says Barber-Doyle, referring to the speed, small space and minimal resources needed to grow larger quantities of fruits and veggies than could be grown on a traditional in-the-earth farm. “Students constructed a solution to many of the food problems they studied.”

“We learned how we can help our community,” said David Bermejo of Bell Gardens, who will be a tenth grader in the fall. He said he and other students already are talking to city officials about how they might create a similar high-performance farm on some of vacant lots in Bell Gardens and nearby cities.

Students say they learned more than how to grow vegetables in the towers and Soxx. “We already are eating better,” said Lizbeth Yanez of Maywood, who also will be a tenth grader in the fall. Moreover, she said, “I never imagined this type of project – but it’s been fun to contribute and learn how to make an idea better.”

Cutter is as jazzed as the students.

“To me this is a game-changer. It’s great way to engage students in urban agriculture and get them to participate in what they grow and eat, plus it can lead to jobs,” said Cutter, a crusader for healthy eating who can riff on boosting plant nutrient content and human health with the enthusiasm of a television evangelist.

About Alegria Fresh:

Alegria Fresh designed and manages Alegria Farms, showcasing urban hydroponic vertical and organic GardenSoxx farm systems. The hydroponic vertical farm employs over 120 hydroponic vertical towers growing over 8,000 plants in less than 1/20th acre. The organic Soxx farm consists of 13 rows of five GardenSoxx each, for a total of 7,800 linear feet of growing space within an 8,500 square foot area (approximately one fifth of an acre).

Alegria Farm is part of the interactive urban agricultural exhibit at the Orange County Great Park in Irvine, California. Alegria Farm is Orange County's first hydroponic vertical farm and organic GardenSoxx farm and the first West Coast showcase for vertical hydroponic systems which uses no soil, up to 90 percent less water, requires 70 percent less land and 50 percent less fertilizer than traditional farming. This high performance growing system produces clean, natural food faster and allows plants to grow bigger and stronger, making plants naturally more pest resistant.

Alegria Farm produces an exotic variety of leafy greens, medicinal herbs and heirloom vegetables. Hydroponic farming is soilless and utilizes coconut fiber instead of organic soil, and produces strong plants that are nutrient-rich. For more information on Alegria Fresh or to schedule a tour of the farm, please visit <http://www.AlegriaFresh.com/> or follow on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#). Alegria Fresh is the high-performance urban agriculture division of EnviroIngenuity, a company dedicated to reducing waste.

Visit Alegria Fresh at <http://www.AlegriaFresh.com/> – Alegria Farm at <http://www.AlegriaFarms.com/> and EnviroIngenuity at <http://www.EnviroIngenuity.com/>.

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